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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [IR](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: PRT WASIT: POLITICAL MOTIVES BEHIND RECENT ISF
ACTION

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Classified By: Classified by: PRT Team Leader Wade Weems for reasons 1.
4 (b and d).

¶1. (S//REL USA, ACGU) Summary. Throughout March, violence escalated in Wasit, fueled by loosened JAM cease-fire restrictions, stepped-up IP operations and the arrival of national police forces. The fighting caused a flurry of political activity and commentary, including visits from CoR members to al Kut on 16 March, the Badr Corps commander on 15 March, and the Minister of Interior on 23 March. National Police forces, sent by MoI at the behest of the PM, unexpectedly arrived on 16 March, prepared to execute sweeping operations. The provincial government claimed no advance knowledge of the deployment. The arrival of three national police units prepared to mount sweeping, vaguely-defined operations, as well as MoI statements and actions on 16-17 March suggest that Sadrists opponents seized on the breakdown of the ceasefire as an opportunity to undercut Sadrist political power in the province. However, CF, PRT and ISF leaders conferred on 17-18 March to narrow and shape the plan, and subsequent operations were generally confined to the planned target list. Two of the three national police units departed al Kut on 23 March, bound for Basra. End Summary.

Earlier March Violence

¶2. (S//REL USA, ACGU) After seven months of infrequent open conflict in al Kut, skirmishing broke out on 4-5 March and street fighting occurred on 12-13 March, likely resulting from the 9 March Sadr Trend announcement of Jaysh al Mahdi's right to self-defense, coupled with a near-simultaneous spike in IP and SWAT operations (reftel).

Political Reaction After First Round of Violence

¶3. (S//REL USA, ACGU) On 15 March CoR members Nassar Rubaai (Sadrists), Falah Hasan Shenshel (Sadrists), Majeed Khairallah al-Zamili (ISCI) and Khawla Abdul Sadeq (Dawa) met with PC Chairman Mohammed Hassan Jabir, local Sadrists and ISF leaders including IP Chief MG Abdul Haninn Hamud. Jabir told the PRT that the CoR Sadrists had complained generally that: (1) IP SWAT operations in Kut exclusively target Sadrists, intending to disable the movement politically in advance of provincial elections, (2) IP and SWAT tactics on raids and detention conditions violate human rights, and (3) Sadrists political enemies, including ISCI, Badr, and Harakat Hezbollah, commit violent acts for which Sadrists invariably are blamed. The Sadrists visitors stressed that ISF must act apolitically, and avoid targeting neighborhoods and individuals of only one political stripe.

¶4. (S//REL USA, ACGU) Despite the complaints, the Sadrists visitors showed willingness to negotiate. In response to a PRT request (passed through Jabir) for a designated Sadrists point of contact, Ra'ad Abdul Hussein, deputy of the Wasit

Sadr office, reportedly was assigned the role, empowered to sign for the release of Sadrists detained by CF, and invested with the authority to dismiss from the Sadrist organization any person involved in ceasefire violations. Further, Jabir told PRT that the CoR Sadrists offered to share with ISF information gathered through Sadrist neighborhood networks about ceasefire violations, including the firing of rockets and mortars. Finally, the delegation hosted a press conference on 15 March in which they reaffirmed the ceasefire and stated that any armed person on the street would face arrest according to Iraqi law.

15. (S//REL USA, ACGU) In addition, Hadi al Amiri, national Badr Corps commander and CoR member, visited al Kut on 15-16 March, meeting with MoI and ISF officers. PC Chair Jabir (political Independent) has communicated multiple times with Sadrist leaders in Najaf, including Luay Sumaysim, head of the Sadrist political commission, and Sadrist PC Member Jawad Mactouf told PRT of frequent communication with Hazim al Arijji in Najaf, conferring over the violence in Wasit.

Arrival of the National Police

16. (S//NF) On 16 March, in the midst of the political stir, two Emergency Response Unit (ERU) companies and a National Iraqi Police Company (INP) arrived in al Kut accompanied by a contingent from MoI. CF leaders and PRT met on FOB Delta with MG Abdul Kareem Kaleef (MOI JCC CDR), Brigadier Ahmed Taha Abu Raeef (MOI Internal Affairs), Brigadier Najef Kareem Al Saade (National Intelligence Unit), Wasit Governor Abd al Latif Hamad Turfa, Wasit IP Chief Haninn, 8th IA Division CG MG Uthman and IA 3/8 CDR Col Ali. According to MG Kaleef, the PM directed the MoI to deploy the units. However, no MoI official could describe precisely the mission of the arriving

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units, nor explain any steps taken to coordinate the operation with CF or local ISF.

17. (S//NF) Governor Turfa, IP Chief Haninn, and CG 8th IA Div MG Uthman claimed no prior knowledge of the deployment, but Turfa thought it a "good opportunity" to address al Kut's security issues. Both Turfa and Haninn privately worried the ERUs would inflame the fighting, then leave provincial forces to contend with the aftermath. Haninn, again speaking privately with CF and PRT, agreed that the ERUs demonstrated national support for his forces, but worried that his provincial force would be seen as weak and inadequate. He questioned the purpose of the deployment, saying that his successes against pockets of armed fighters the previous week showed that he required no operational support. CF leaders told the assembled ISF commanders that the operation should not proceed without further planning to clearly identify the mission and integrate and de-conflict CF, ERU, IA and IP actions. MG Abdul Kareem at first said that his units would depart Wasit the following morning, but that evening received a call from MoI instructing him to continue the mission.

18. (S//NF) On 17-18 March, CF leaders, including the 3ID DCG-M, expressed faith in the capabilities of national and provincial ISF units, but stressed detailed planning, careful targeting and integration of CF support for medevac, civil affairs, etc. The scope of the operation was winnowed in planning meetings to a target list of 202 individuals, for which MoI had arrest warrants for forty. Brigadier Najef Kareem said he could detain those without warrants for 72 hours. When asked in a private meeting about the targets and supporting evidence, Haninn said that national intelligence supporting these targets differed from his own and perhaps was less accurate. On 17 March, MG Abdul Kareem said the MoI ordered him to continue his mission, per direct order from the PM, and Minister MoI and "MNF-I" called Haninn asking about the delays. In response, Haninn described CF concerns and the continuing planning effort. Haninn told CF leaders that the "lack of coordination" between CF, local and

national police "was obvious," but stressed that "I don't want to lose friends in the MOI," and confided that "I am in a bad situation." Despite promises from MG Abdul Kareem on 16 and 17 March that no operations would occur prior to finalization of the plans, it later became clear that MOI raids and arrests were executed on both days. Satisfied that the MoI mission had been coordinated and the scope of the MoI mission appropriately tailored, CF commanders agreed to commence operations on 19 March.

Evidence of Political Motive

¶9. (S//REL USA, ACGU) In describing the MoI operation to CF and PRT, MoI officials repeatedly stated their intent to arrest political leaders because "no political leader should be above the law just because of his position." One ISF officer stated that the al Kut operation was the first step to "clean Sadrists" and the next step would be Amarah. MoI officials also told PC Chair Jabir to prepare for the arrest of "several" Sadrist political leaders. Indeed, ERU raided the home of Sadrist PC member Ahmed Shehad on 16 March and arrested his six brothers. The following day, Sadrist PC member Jawad Mactouf told PRT that one of the arrested brothers was beaten in an effort to extract incriminating evidence against Mactouf. Reportedly, also on 16 March, two Sadrist city council members were arrested. Lastly, without prompting, MG Haninn, a man disinclined to talk politics, warned that the ERU operation was the first step towards rising violence in advance of provincial elections: "Quiet is not in the interests of some people." Many groups would be involved, he said, not just Jaysh al Mahdi, and he said violence committed by these groups often is blamed on JAM. He did not identify the groups, but said, "Everyone knows Iranian intelligence agents are involved in al Kut." He said the violence would crescendo just prior to the elections and that he expects dramatic attacks, to include car bombs and suicide vests.

Increased Sadrist Engagements

¶10. (S//REL USA, ACGU) The volume of Sadrist contacts with the PRT grew significantly in recent weeks. Sadrist PC members Ebrah and Maktouf repeatedly told the PRT of their belief that "CF and the State Department" had discouraged unrestrained sweeps by the national police, and demanded focused operations driven by criminal evidence. PRT also has received numerous calls from Ebrah and Sadr Office deputy Ra,ad Abdul Hussein inquiring about possible future meetings, CF detainee releases, and offering explanations of Sadrist perspective on the situation in al Kut. Mactouf also told the PRT of internal divisions amongst Sadrist political and militia leaders over the proper response to recent ISF

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activity, the status of the ceasefire and contact with the PRT.

¶11. (S//REL USA, ACGU) MoI operations from 18-23 March were conducted throughout al Kut and in Numaniyah, in conjunction with IP and CF. PRT has received reports that the operations stayed generally within the agreed upon parameters. The MoI sent two of the ERU companies to Basra on 23 March, leaving one national police company in al Kut.

¶12. (S//REL USA, ACGU) Comment: The seven-month ceasefire bolstered Sadrist political strength in Wasit. But, as MG Haninn said, "Quiet is not in the interests of some," namely Sadrist political rivals unready to cede power. The 9 March Sadrist "self-defense" statement coincided with renewed ISF and CF operations in al Kut and select militia, broadly interpreting "self-defense," showed modest activity, which MG Haninn appeared to fully have under control by 16 March. CF and PRT pressure on MoI to focus the mission on detentions supportable by criminal evidence and to better coordinate with CF slowed the operation. PRT assesses that these limitations prevented ERU operations from appearing excessive

and politically driven, thereby (1) preventing marginalization of moderate Sadrists politicians who have pushed a non-violent agenda in order to gain political legitimacy, (2) avoiding bolstering Sadrists and JAM militants who have been lobbying for an end to ceasefire restraints, and (3) opening previously unavailable avenues to moderate Sadrists politicians who know the role played by CF and PRT in limiting the MoI operation. PRT will drive towards convincing these moderates of a mutual interest in marginalizing or eliminating non-compliant militants (and possibly other common enemies) who threaten Sadrists political prospects in the approaching elections.

¶13. (S//REL USA, ACGU) Comment continued: Our potential for success would be increased by (1) an effort to engage Sadrists at all levels of the organization; Wasit Sadrists appear more willing to engage with PRT than their leaders in Najaf will allow, (2) ISF must avoid appearing to be politically-driven, perhaps by undertaking operations in non-Sadrists neighborhoods, targeting criminal elements in non-Sadrists groups, publicizing criminal evidence that supports the chosen targets, and (3) convincing non-Sadrists leaders to abandon the view of politics as a zero sum game and attempt to engage their Sadrists rivals. There must be acceptance of political integration or this episode in al Kut will be only the first of a rising crescendo of fighting before the approaching elections. End Comment.
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